

Seattle Light Rail Review Panel

Meeting Notes for January 20, 2004

Agenda Items

- Beacon Hill Station – Color and Material Update
- Vent Shaft Art Plan
- North Link SEIS Review and Coordination

Panel Members Present

- Jack Mackie, Chair
- Jay Lazerwitz
- Mimi Sheridan

Staff Present

- Rabia Belt, City Design
- Marty Curry, Planning Commission
- Liz Ellis, Sound Transit
- Greg Hill, Streeter Architects
- Karen Kiest, Kiest Landscape Architects
- Lisa Rutzick, City Design
- Ries Niemi, Sound Transit
- John Walser, Sound Transit

Beacon Hill Station – Color and Material Update

John Walser, Sound Transit

When John's team last presented, they had rendering boards with a very rough sample of the spray-on acoustic and the design team's 1st approximation of the color selection. The Panel wanted to see the final color selection and the acoustic material. The surface of the material is still rough, but it's been smoothed down from the previous stucco texture. It's a cementitious acoustic material sprayed onto the concrete walls of the tunnel. It will also be sprayed on the back, so that the noise of the approaching trains gets absorbed. The color is a deep blue. The material stops about 100 feet from the edge of the tube.

Discussion:

- Where does the color stop? *There will be a stainless steel ring 1 ft. in thickness and beyond that it will be a dark grey.*
- The band is full around? *The band will start at the base and then come around.*
- Is there any lighting? *There is emergency lighting. I don't remember the spacing. There's just enough so that people for emergency purposes can see where they're going. That will start further in.*
- If the tunnel is dark enough, they won't sense the color change. *We will make sure that the color doesn't reflect the lighting and shine off.*
- Will the lights be directional, but not in the driver's face? *Yes. They actually go down and the trains run in the other direction, so they shoot towards the other direction.*
- It generates a peculiar sense, an odd notion, like a film noir [laughter].

Vent Shaft Art Plan

Greg Hill, Streeter Architects

Karen Kiest, Kiest Landscape Architecture

Ries Niemi, Artist

Mr. Hill observed that when the Panel met the last time, there were a couple of questions for the team. One question was about future developments. The design has been developed so that in the future, there could be additional development. They set the vent shaft back so that there could be retail or development. A subtle differences

between the previous design iteration and that presented today is that the buildings actually follow the vertical slope. Another change is with the mesh around the top of the display that is held up by large steel pieces. Instead of 5 pieces, they've shifted to 2 shapes that are stainless steel and much better scaled. The block that they've chosen has a scrim on the inside that is backlit; therefore, the light is more diffuse. The last change is from tile to stainless steel. The materials in the turtleneck are different than the 2 tile pieces in the stairwell or vent shaft, which are porcelain. Mr. Hill showed the display of the materials.

Before Ms. Kiest begins, there is a reminder that when the Panel met the last time, there was approval on the actual structure. They were asked to look more at the landscape and talk further about art elements. They haven't gotten rid of all the landscape and they are in the process of working with City staff on the ability to waive codes. However, they are not completely waived so they have not been able to get rid of the landscape completely.

Ms. Kiest says that when the team last presented, there were 2 key questions. One question was about the inhospitability of the landscape. What the team has done is reduce the extent of the landscape and work with and add other elements such as art so that there is more going on. There is still an urban design element. Terry Avenue is considered a corner. They have made the area larger. As a setting for art elements, they wanted something that basically worked as a setting for art and as a barrier to keep people away from the vent shaft. The plant materials they are considering are spiny plants. They have "attractive armor;" they have done it before with rose bushes. It's an additional layer of protection to the site that is an alternative to a fence and it acts as an extension of the sidewalk and curb. There will be high planters and where the building has more of a red tone, they will provide a flowering rose. It's a flexible arrangement they are trying to keep simple and legible. Ms. Kiest is happy that they have an artist on the team, although she reminds the Panel that his presentation is more of a work in progress.

Mr. Niemi notes that he has just been retained, so he only has some quick ideas. He's been inspired by wireframe drawings and computers. He shows a few pictures that he's done recently, illustrating light bulbs and structures that are very light and airy with a lot of presence but without a lot of mass. He thinks that the site is very theatrical and serves as the entrance to downtown. He likes how the highway cuts through downtown and creates open space. Because the structures will be executed in stainless steel, they will be very ethereal and transparent and pick up a lot of light. He wanted to have the sculptures alive without them being human figures. The 8 foot wide planter bed separates the vent shaft from the public. The sculptures will rise out of it. The sculptures are currently envisioned as 15-18 feet tall. He thinks that they will respond to the 4 columns, the old and the new. The bottle is a big bottle, perhaps 2.5-3 feet in diameter. The sculptures are big enough to hold their own in a very dense streetscape.

Discussion:

- Is the material the type on the display (points to the display)? *Yes, after I finish the sculpture, I have it electro-polished. It's easy to clean, and is a little shiny. The majority of the piece will be smooth; some parts might be hammered. It's extremely strong.*
- It's great for a person to climb. *I try to keep the grid tighter at the bottom so that it's harder to climb and then looser on the top.*

- I like it and I think it's a really good idea. I agree that it's a really theatrical place and I like the colors and the shapes.
- Some of us like the big hole.
- When the hotel comes, there will be another issue. Aside from the architecture, the art may be moved. *They are designed as 3 discrete objects which can be moved. They're not going to weigh that much, about a thousand pounds, so you can move them.*
- They might be moved to the east side of Terry, which isn't big enough to put a building in.
- When we started out this design, there was going to be urban design, but there wasn't going to be an artist. All the pieces came together well.
- All the necessary parts.
- I think that Karen has been able to get away from the landscape that was full of trash, but still have landscaping.
- I think that you've successfully solved the problem of landscaping. What's the new standard that the City is pushing? *We've proposed using a better soil so that we can extend the planting. The tree grades will be replaced.*
- The City is accepting that? *They are insisting on the tree grades.*
- Ok, good. *It used to be a smooth band which is where the tree grade was, but this will change so the 2 x 2 area will extend to the street.*
- I know that Greg mentioned that in the last block that there will be a lot of people at night, but I don't know if you can light the sculptures. Light will be good. *Yes, the sculptures take well to light.*
- What's the landscaping in the planter beds? *On the east end it's roses and on the west it's barberry.*
- If you want to get on the sculpture, you'd have to get through the roses.
- The metal grate that's shown, where is that? *It's the pink shape on the diagram. We wanted to give a breathing element.*
- What is the difficulty? I think that the Panel supports this plan. *The issue is getting the City Council for all Sound Transit work to have the Director waive the land use elements. This is where the City felt that it's a bit different from where the land use code reads.*
- That's the problem we're up against with Beacon Hill. We've been asked to use storefront windows because of the pedestrian overlay zone so we have to go through City Council. Everyone agrees that we have a good design.
- On this side, we're basically saying for this use, it's not appropriate, but for future use, development can happen. *Transparency issues and landscaping are the issues.*
- Do any of the Panelists have a problem with transparency?
- I don't, but one consideration here is that this is a very temporary thing. I think ideally vents will be incorporated into the buildings, but this is in the future.
- This is the tree grade that was used for DSDP?
- Yes, it says DSDP on it. I wonder what the process is. *I think this plot is part of that. The City asked us to put it back the way we found it. They'd like us to put those trees back the way we found it.*
- But this will be the same grade.
- Can Sound Transit keep an eye on that?

Action

We thank Sound Transit and the team for coming back. We think the resolutions with the site planning and the landscaping all meet our requests and are successful. The Panel enthusiastically accepts the work of the artist. The drawing that illustrates how the

building lays on the site is useful. We ask that the director waive the transparency requirement due to the temporary nature of the requirement and the landscaping regulations for this requirement.

Action passes unanimously.

On Panel member sat in on a meeting with the City to try to resolve the Beacon Hill situation. Apparently, the Director is not provided a mechanism to waive opportunities and they need to get the City Council to give the Director this opportunity to waive some of the requirements. What would be helpful from the Panel is a recommendation urging the Council to grant that opportunity. It is a similar provision to one that SMP has built into its code. It would be how Sound Transit would get variance without going through the variance code. It gives the Director an ability to negotiate and maneuver. The Panel agrees to take an action to indicate its support of the Director to the City Council.

Action

The Panel wishes to give the Director the general authority to waive the zoning code requirements. The Director will rely on the panel in general instances when they arise.

Action passes unanimously.

LRRP Business

Lisa introduces Rabia Belt, who is filling in for Kathy Dockins who is leaving the City to pursue a career in forensics. The next meeting is scheduled for February 3rd. Panel meetings will become more sporadic as business is wrapped up, but as construction is continuing, the Panel may have to resolve issues that come up in the field. Charles Anderson is the new Panel member from the Design Commission. The Panel is a little short on members right now. Lisa sent out an email about membership. She senses that energy is flagging, but she wants to make sure that North Link will have the full enthusiasm of the Panel when it kicks in. The next few months will be sporadic, but then business will pick up again.

Jack Mackie announced that he is going to resign from the Panel. He has already talked to John Rahaim about his decision. He has enjoyed his tenure on the Panel and if there are questions about construction design, he is available.

Discussion:

The Panel discussed the professional expertise of the current membership and the future membership. They noted that a person with public art experience is a key voice to retain.

Jack says that if the Panel grants him the ability to approve the minutes then he will approve them. The motion passes unanimously. Jack approves the minutes for 10/2, 11/25, 2/18, 4/1 and 6/17, 2003.

North Link SEIS Review and Coordination

Marty Curry, Seattle Planning Commission

Lisa Rutzick, Light Rail Review Panel

Ms. Curry thanks the Panel for submitting comments on the North Link SEIS. She will walk through the document and if there are any blanks, then she and Lisa can fill them in. Clearly, the letter will begin with the requisite, "thank you for the opportunity." The SEIS is very thorough, but overall, the Panel's comments do a good job of laying out the alternatives for them to review. The Panel concurs that the document provides a good baseline of information. However, they have to make sure that there is time for the various alternatives, so they don't get short shrift. It's important to go back to the original Sound Transit proposal and look at how the alternatives fit the original goals. There's been so much pressure on Sound Transit so the cost considerations are paramount, but not everything should be driven by cost. There's a larger context for where the Planning Commission is.

Transportation

The overall document is well written. However, one concern is that there's often a fairly broad assumption that one can easily understand transportation benefits. This analysis, though, hides non-intuitive elements that surface when you dig deeper. Here, for instance, it is noted that transportation has improved. This is true, but that may disguise some specific local elements that may potentially have negative impacts on current patrons of bus service. That takes a more detailed analysis. What's the potential for negative impacts and what's the tradeoff? The initial statement is too broad. This has a relationship with the nature of the distribution of benefits, like with the EIS, which is environmental justice. Maybe the bus riders will find their needs aren't met. Fixed guideway investments poach the best bus service. How are the free hours reprogrammed? Those decisions are being made by another party; what Metro decides to do is not under the Panel's authority. This may come under the purview of people who aren't paying for the Sound Transit investment. The Panel should have more information on this issue. The EIS can be a way for this analysis to be made. The idea is that Metro will use their surface plan procedures to do it, but that's not very comforting.

It's going to be very difficult for anyone to weigh the information so that it's set in a clear partitioned way. You have to pick through each route to see the full impact; otherwise it's too much information. It's also important to have information on what the road closures are. They're closing down traffic through a neighborhood; they should have information on detour routes during construction.

Discussion:

- On December 2nd I received some information on system-wide ridership and cost effectiveness. This analysis, is it useful and cutting edge or is it misplaced?
- It's not particularly useful, no.
- I talk about that in the economic section. The old transportation analysis is fundamentally flawed and that's what's used in the EIS. Previously, it was an esoteric issue but now there's a scale issue. Potentially, you have scenarios with low cost-low benefit and some with high cost-high benefit and how do you compare those situations? So you have to do an aggregate method of social utility. If you measure all the changes as they occur and use a common metric, that would work. What they will do is use the new methodology for the preferred alternative, but that doesn't give you a good way to interpret the analysis and I don't understand the reason for doing it now. I think that you want something that says, "If you do this, then you need to do it."
- Do you think the SEIS should apply this new methodology?
- I don't remember, but I think the FEIS has the preferred alternative identified. The best case scenario is that you have this information when you are making a

decision, but if the analysis is already done, that's nice, but it's not as helpful. I don't really know. It is a problem. The only reason not to do it now is because you didn't want to. To have it happen after the decision is already made, I guess it's ok.

- But if they do it and release it before the FEIS, then it's not after the fact. It could influence it and people can see how the FEIS was influenced.
- Sound Transit is obligated to do it. Having a methodology to do it implies that it has some relevance. If that's true, then you might want to create an alternative analysis. If that isn't the case, then you have multiple criteria and the interaction of these factors is complex and the decision making process is largely arbitrary. To the extent that you're able to minimize the arbitrary set of criteria, it's good to do that.
- If it were funded, here's an opportunity to use this alternative that could be forward looking. It could be good for future changes for the system. For some of the changes, such as under the ship canal, they're very provocative.
- Just looking at the impacts of the construction on 81st Street, is there a more specific program for the businesses affected and how long the program will last?
- I think that it wouldn't be difficult for them to include it. They can speak to the lessons they've learned already.
- Are there any other land use economic issues that people want to speak to? The effects are much more focused, although I think that the one area that's different is the Roosevelt area because there are many different types of activity.
- The issue of mitigation for University Heights School is important. I remember at the time when we discussed it that it was a big concern and they wanted to use their parking lot. I don't understand how that vacancy can survive without that. I think the EIS is not required or encouraged to address things like this. I think that it's a major concern. For the University Heights Community Center, that's a self-supporting non-profit. Did it mention the Farmer's Market?
- Yes, it's being relocated.

Visual resources and aesthetics

There were some interesting references to using additional landscaping as mitigation efforts, but there was no mention of additional design elements that can be used. There's no reference to the vehicle itself passing through the neighborhoods and the light and glare and its impact. There was some evasion of responsibility in a couple of spots. In the Roosevelt area when the station is along I-5, I'm wondering who is connecting the dots there.

Discussion:

- They don't look at the connections of different neighborhood plans.
- But the boulevard has a very checkered history.
- So your concern is that they reference the area that's available because they relocate the houses without recognizing the intent of why they are being relocated?
- Yes, and trees and other elements. They need to take more responsibility.
- I think there's more in the historical section.
- So you might want to just reference that and confirm that.
- My comments were very similar. I realize that I read them with the understanding that the Panel exists and I have confidence that Sound Transit can continue through this design process. Shadowing is an exception; I don't think it's being dealt with enough. Planting trees around a structure doesn't do it. I hoped that there would be an emphasis on design and building with the smallest mass

possible. Everyone agrees that under I-5 is terrific and I find that that attitude is lacking here. Design is important. The sections that travel through tunnels will not provide views for passengers. I wonder, what is the aesthetic of the ride? In Portland, it's noisy and disorienting. I don't find any reference in the SEIS to the aesthetics of the tunnel ride. It needs to be approached from a ridership perspective.

- They reference it earlier.
- But it needs to be addressed here. I don't know what the ride time will be there. It's a very confined space.
- *We can get the ride times for you.*
- *We put together a handout for the open house on how long it takes between certain stations.*
- I'm interested in the underground stations.
- I'm interested in how noisy it will be. I would encourage them to minimize the noise. I don't know what the reasonable range is.
- Yes, I want the noise minimized, but I don't accept the tunnel as a barren place and that you hope to get to the station really quickly. It can be designed from a ridership perspective.
- Is that an EIS issue?
- I don't know.
- If you're saying that there is no view; mitigation could be to provide a view.
- Yes, a key question is what is the view?
- I think we need to word this for an EIS.
- Yes, and how it can be mitigated.
- I have trouble seeing this as an adverse impact.
- I've seen systems where they do things with light. Like in San Francisco, people get anxious. So they do things like how deep they are under the water [laughter]. There are cues that indicate you are coming into the station and the colors indicate to the rider what particular station. You can do a number of things. It's a question of where do you present them.
- The REM is nice, it's a traditional way of looking at things, but I think that, especially at Ravenna, it's above ground and there's other transportation. I would like to see another simulation of I-5 and looking at the rails. I like that they are recognizing design as an important component and that I think in Ravenna they need to make it look elegant. I think that the assessment is done for technical elements; they need to emphasize design. It's the only section where people come into connection with the rail frequently.
- In Northgate.
- Ok, applied to that area as well.

Air quality

The 1st sentence wasn't meant to be subjunctive. There are some interesting things here. Does the traffic analysis reflect the impression of air quality here? If there's no parking or impact zones, then the traffic analysis may indicate different traffic patterns and the air quality might be altered. The 3rd bullet is nagging. At times people might be taking credit for reduced improvements. That sentiment is not reflected elsewhere. This section doesn't include noise and vibration inside the vehicles. This is an important point. The 3rd bullet under noise and vibration doesn't evaluate the noise of the trains as they come out of a portal, or turn or brake. The 2nd bullet is notable. They did some noise measurements, but I don't know how the sites were selected. They are sort of a missed opportunity, as it's good to work with people in the area, not only as public outreach but also for the veracity of information. It's a lost opportunity. The 2nd to last bullet is similar to

comments made earlier about minimizing impacts and mitigation. There is a consistency problem. Sometimes there is no noise problem listed and sometimes there are problems that are discussed. It doesn't follow. It is clear that the University and Sound Transit have talked a lot about vibration. It's interesting to see how careful the wording is here [laughter].

If Sound Transit believes that it can mitigate light rail vibration, there should be a follow-up statement. I admire the statements about storm water. They are important considerations. There is a disconnection with noise and vibration under water and the noise and vibration section overall. The energy analysis is inconsistent. For geology and soils, they should indicate the magnitude of the impact.

Discussion:

- That raises the questions of noise. If it's a retained cut – if one side is closed and one side is open – will it retain noise? I never thought of that.
- It depends on where you are. But on the way to Northgate, that's mostly where they occur.
- In electromagnetic fields, I think there should be more technical information. It seems as if the solutions are in hand.

Public Safety

Discussion:

- I think that it should refer back to the comments on resources.
- I didn't say anything about police access. For some elements, the police can only get there by elevators. The elevators in general can be a public safety issue.
- I know that we discussed this earlier. Access was a big issue.

Historical and archeological resources

They should mention that design is part of their engagement here. The Olmstead people are suggesting that you can't move the freeway structure to minimize the dissonance. The design should be brought up in the specifics and should be part of the mitigation. SPU is destroying the Bobby Morris Playfield. They are removing the reservoir and putting in a whole new thing. They added a concrete railing. They're going to put in a water feature to "evoke" the reservoir. That should be discussed more. I've been told that it's doubtful that they can move the train, so you can't really move Sound Transit. They've already made their provisions.

Discussion:

- Yes, you can't challenge it at this point.
- The issue of the economic impacts on University Heights needs to be discussed. They are 2 very old houses and a very interesting preservation.

Parklands

Discussion:

- I think that Mimi has said it all. If there's a headhouse in the park, that will generate different uses. In this document, should there be a discussion of changed social uses?
- I would think so.
- I didn't see anything about changed people use. There's no clarity on moving the tree.
- They said that they have been working on that throughout. But I don't know that tree.

- There's very dense planting on that corner. They should articulate the design and mitigation process that will accentuate the character of that area.
- I'd like more discussion of direct impacts on parkland. There should be attention to design, it's buried in there. I'm wondering about b-1d, b-13d, b-14d; how deep is that there?
- It's pretty deep. I think the landscape issues are important for buffering but they need to work with design to create a parklike atmosphere.

Construction impacts

Discussion:

- It's difficult to analyze the subroutes because of how it's been pulled apart.
- There's a threshold of construction impacts.
- It's so complex.
- So maybe they should make it clearer and have a summary statement.
- Can you put in the economic impacts of construction?

Cumulative impacts

Discussion:

- If there's other construction going on at the same time, but we don't know the schedule, that would be a problem. We might be able to come up with cumulative impacts for Northgate. There's a lot of activity planned there. No one knows the timing, so it's hard to say what's cumulative.
- But we can say that they should at least acknowledge other potential projects. If it comes at the same time, how do they acknowledge and prepare? It seems fair to have some kind of statement of commitment on coordination.

Overall issues and concerns

Discussion:

- Are all of these alternatives consistent with local plans, the Comp plan and the City plan? Is there equity with disadvantaged communities?
- All of these have to be depicted so we can compare the alternatives. The other issue is that we can't compare alternatives in terms of the transportation effect because we don't know how to grade them.
- Why don't we use words like "consider the advantages of using the new methodology"?
- We can say that "we know that you have this new methodology and we urge you to consider it."
- I don't think that we know enough to say that they should.
- Most of the comments are like that. I don't think that any of them are pointing to fatal flaws. I think that they are all relatively minor comments. And I think that we can convey that. It's the guide to how to identify impacts over time that you use.
- I agree that the decision begins at this point. I think it's cumulative.
- What we will do next is turn this into a letter.
- This is due on the 31st so we will try to get this to you at the end of the week.

The meeting adjourned at 6:10 pm.